

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

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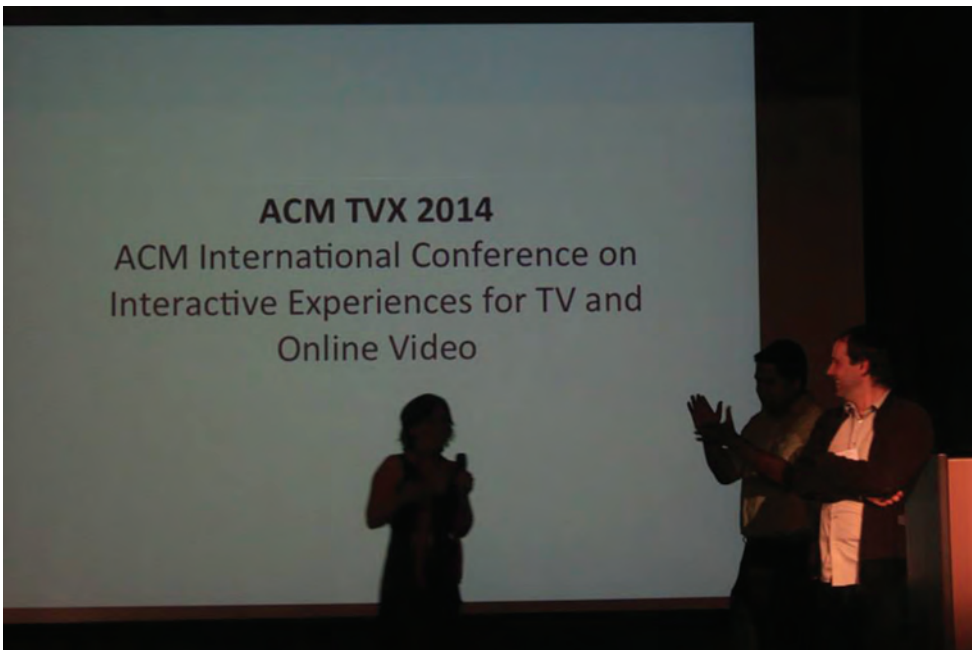
# History Meets The Future At Euroitv2013, Como, Italy, 24–26 June

Holding a conference in late June 2013 at the famous lake Como seems like a cunning plot of the Italian ministry of tourism to lure more tourists to the area. The researchers from both industry and academia attending the eleventh EuroITV conference were indeed charmed by the nice weather, great food and stunning scenery the city of Como had to offer. While all of this could be enjoyed during the coffee or lunch breaks and social events in the evenings, most time was spent inside the premises of the Polytechnic University of Milan (campus Como) where the conference attendees participated in inspiring tutorials and interactive workshops, listened to presentations of the most recent research in the field of interactive television and online video, or were impressed by the many demos at the conference. Little did they know that this was going to be a historic edition of the EuroITV conference series, and they would be up for a big surprise at the closing session. But let's not jump ahead, and go back to the beginning: the pre-conference day on 24 June.

Like many conferences, EuroITV traditionally starts with a pre-conference day hosting several workshops, tutorials and a doctoral consortium. It is a nice way, especially for newcomers, to actively start the event and get to know



*Figure 1: Many workshops and presentations addressed the multi-screen living room environment  
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*Figure 2: Announcement of the successor to EuroITV, the ACM International Conference on Interactive Experiences for TV and Online Video (TVX2014) © EuroITV2013.*

new people in a social and interactive setting. These activities are typically also a bellwether for the state of the field, and offer a prelude to the topics and themes that will mature and be presented at later editions of the conference. In this case, well-attended workshops on multi-screen applications, multi-user interaction, linking television with the web and interactive content consumption indicate a vibrant community of researchers that are exploring new ways in which individuals or groups of people are interacting with TV. In all workshops, using tablets and smartphones (aka second or multi-screen applications) was a prominent and recurring theme, showing the clear impact these devices are having on the field.

At the same time, young researchers attended the doctoral consortium, presenting their vision on where research should be headed. The Ph.D. of Bruno Nobre indicates that the user experience design of interactive TV services is still evolving, and new approaches are needed due to the constantly changing technologies and applications. Both Alan Angeluci and Sam Agten presented innovative concepts for second screen applications, which shows that the idea of a second screen is maturing and is going beyond traditional concepts such as playing along, chatting or extra information, and can also be used in classrooms in remote areas or for enhancing the engagement with narrative-driven TV shows. Finally, David Green looked at the production side, something that is often overlooked, and presented new low-cost tools for DIY documentary film-makers. For this novel view on the field and the clear and engaging way he presented his research idea, he received the best Ph.D. award at the closing event of the conference two days later.

On day two of EuroITV 2013, the main conference started with a keynote presentation by Chris Noessel, one of the authors of the book *Make it So: Interaction Design Lessons from Science Fiction* (2012). In the presentation, as in the book, he discussed how science fiction and design influence each other. Illustrated with several examples from illustrious sci-fi movies such as *Star Trek*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Fifth Element*, and of course, *Minority Report* for pointing out the limitations of gestural interfaces, Noessel explained how we can use science fiction to improve our work on interactive TV, and think about the future and the role of technology in our lives. Conversely, changes in technology and society also influenced how movies depicted interfaces. The advent of television clearly marked a different view on how screens were presented and controlled in films such as *Buck Rogers* (the 1939 movie, not the TV series from the 1970s some of us enjoyed as a kid). And of course, we should not forget to enjoy science fiction interfaces as well, as a vision of film-makers that can design new ways of interacting without any constraints.

After this inspiring keynote, the conference attendees went back to reality for a madness session that introduced the first demo session. Many demos presented were as varied as the presentations in the parallel paper sessions during the rest of the morning and afternoon. Gesture interaction, using second screens to control interactive content and multi-screen user experiences were the most prevalent themes of the day. One presentation that stood out of the crowd was a presentation by Radu-Daniel Vatavu on interacting with content outside of the physical TV screen. Instead of resorting to devices such as a laptop, tablet or smartphone, Vatavu presented a concept that projects extra content next to the TV screen on the wall and that allows viewers to check social network updates or browse and select other content to watch. While there are definitely many questions that can be raised and still need to be researched before successfully implementing this concept,

the presentation matched nicely with the theme of the conference, Thinking Outside the Box. Another compelling presentation, which received the best paper award at the end of the conference, was on freehand gestural text entry for interactive TV by Gang Ren and Eamonn O'Neill. The novel way to input text on a TV screen was not only presented in a paper session, conference attendees could also interact with the circular layout during the demo session. This second conference day was ended socializing during a dinner with a view of lake Como, a well-deserved reward for an intensive day of demos and presentations.

While some women (and men) were disappointed that they didn't run into George Clooney despite holding the conference dinner on the lakeshore right across his villa, the following morning everyone's attention was immediately grabbed by another inspiring keynote presentation. Sriram Subramanian from the University of Bristol awed the audience with examples of their cutting-edge technology for supporting interaction through mid-air gestures with haptic feedback using ultra-sound. While this might sound elusive, Subramanian gave examples of how this technology can create more engaging experiences while watching television by making people not just see but also feel what is happening on-screen. Other technologies that are developed at his lab and were included in the talk are shape-shifting devices, multi-view devices offering different views of the same content based on different view-points, and water displays. Like the keynote from Noessel on the previous day, the EuroITV 2013 participants were left with plenty of food for thought and inspiration for future conferences.

Speaking of the future, during the closing session of EuroITV not only awards were presented (best paper, best Ph.D., best demo and the Grand Challenge winner), but also the location of the next edition of the conference was announced. Much to the surprise of all attendants, this was the last edition of EuroITV. Fortunately, this doesn't mean that the conference will stop and there are no more opportunities for researchers from industry and academia to share results or confront each other with new ideas. On the contrary, EuroITV will transform into TVX – a fully ACM sponsored International Conference on Interactive Experiences for Television and Online Video. This transformation accounts for the increasing international attention EuroITV has gained during the past years. The first edition of ACM TVX2014 – EuroITV new style – will be organized by Newcastle University's Culture Lab in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, from 25 to 27 June 2014 (see <http://tvx2014.com/>).

Building on the foundations of EuroITV, it's clear that with the new TVX conference series there is a bright future for presenting and discussing research on interactive experiences for television and online video.

## REFERENCE

Shedroff, N. and Noessel, C. (2012), *Make it So: Interaction Design Lessons from Science Fiction*, Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfeld Media.

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